

Vayikra Headless!

If his offering is a bird...he shall sever its head

Vayikra 1:14–15

When a person brings an offering, he is supposed to relate to the animal and realize that what happens to it is what the person, himself, really deserves.¹

When a bird is brought as a sin offering, the head is severed by a method called *melika*. The neck is broken from the back to remind us not to be too stiff-necked, to be ready to change our sinful ways.² However, when doing *melika*, the person must take great care not to sever the dove's head entirely,³ for the mind is always meant to lead the heart⁴ and must never be completely removed from it. We are to remind ourselves that our sins would not have occurred had we let our intellects lead the way, and compelled our hearts and emotions to follow.

The Torah often refers to the intellect as *lev*, heart.⁵ Why? Rav Avigdor Miller⁶ explains that what one knows is only truly called knowledge when it penetrates the heart. So long as information is only in your brain and remains separated from your heart and actions, it is just chunks of data. Until the information collected is also felt with the emotions, knowledge is incomplete.

If you see someone insult another person's mother, you know they have done something wrong. But when someone insults your own mother, your heart begins to beat faster; you are ready to leap to her defense! Your emotions are in sync with your brain – your knowledge has penetrated your heart. You don't just know that this is wrong, you really *know* it through and through.

Ultimately, the journey of a Jewish life is this very journey of bringing information from the intellect to the emotions: “*You have known today, and you shall bring it home to your heart, that Hashem is the Lord, there is none other than Him.*”⁷ In this way, the mind influences and leads the emotions.

There is a nation whose entire reason for existence is to challenge the mind-heart connection. This is Amalek, whose essence is the separation of head from heart – *am*, “nation,” and *malak*,

1 *Sefer Hachinuch*, 124

2 *Ibid.*

3 Vayikra 5:8, Chullin 21b

4 *Noam Hamitzvos*, Mitzvah 124

5 Radak and Ibn Ezra to Tehillim 16:9

6 *Sing You Righteous*, p. 16

7 Dvarim 4:39. See *Chochmah Umussar*, vol. 1, p. 128 of R. Simcha Z. Ziv, the *Alter* of Kelm.

like the word *melika*.⁸ They are a people of *melika*, of heads that are severed, for they refuse to allow what they know in their minds to reach their hearts or actions.⁹ This quality was inherited from their ancestor Esav,¹⁰ who had his head in the right place¹¹ and knew right from wrong, but did not allow that wisdom to influence him.

Thus, the nation of Amalek knew that they could not win if they attacked the Jewish people in the desert,¹² yet they would not allow this information to penetrate beyond the intellectual plane. This was also the driving force behind Haman's attack on the Jewish people in the time of Queen Esther: in true Amalekite fashion, Haman consistently acted against his own best interests by not allowing his brain to impact his emotions.¹³

A major weapon in Amalek's arsenal is doubt. Doubting the facts is an all-too-effective way of allowing a person to ignore the truth and let emotions take over. Not surprisingly, the *gematria* of Amalek is 240, the same as *safek*, "doubt."¹⁴ Thus, our job is to fight doubt by knowing the facts and translating that knowledge into faith (knowledge of the heart).

8 *Torah Obr* (of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi) to Tetzaveh, p. 85

9 See *Chiddushei Harim* cited in *Likkutei Yehuda* to Shelach, where he explains that when the Torah tells us that "Amalek dwells in the South" (Bamidbar 13:29), this is because the south is often associated with wisdom, and Amalek is wise, for he knows right from wrong. He just refuses to let that knowledge penetrate into his heart.

10 *Likkutei Maamarim* of R. Tzadok of Lublin, 16; *Shem Mishmuel*, Tetzaveh/Shushan Purim, s.v. *bigemara*

11 Esav's head was buried in the Cave of Machpelah (see Targum Yonason to Bereishis 50:13). Arizal wrote that Esav's head was connected to holiness; see *Yaaros Devash* 2:15. See also *Derech Sicha* of R. Chaim Kanievsky, vol. 1, p. 100; *Mareh Hapanim* to Yerushalmi, Taanis 4:2 and *Ben Yehoyada* to Eruvin 53a.

12 Rashi on Dvarim 25:18, s.v. *asher karcha*

13 See also the comments of Sfes Emes to Yisro, 5641, s.v. *bimidrash*, where he explains that Amalek is called a scoffer by the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 27:10) because the nature of scoffing is that one makes light of even what is evidently the truth.

14 *Keser Shem Tov* of Baal Shem Tov, Kehos ed. Hosafos 118. *Felach Harimon* to Shemos, Megillas Esther p. 355 in Kehos ed. citing R. Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, *Pri Chaim*, Komarno, Arachim, Yod, Yehosef (11th entry) p. 226 citing his grandfather the *Notzer Chesed* (to Avos 1:15 Assei Lecha Rav), *Mavo Lichochemas Hakaballah* by the Leshem, Chelek Alef, p. 82. See also *Al Hanissim*, Weinfeld, to Purim, Ad Delo Yada, 5.

Incidentally, its brought in the *Pirush Hasiddur* of the Rokeach that *vayivarech david es Hashem* (Divrei Hayamim 1, 29:10) is the first letters of the word *vadai* or certainty, as we call Hashem in our High Holiday prayers *baVadai shemo* He whose name is Certainty. The Arizal later said this as well in *Shaar Hakavanos*, *Drushei Yom Hakipurim*.

See also *Semichas Chachamim* of R. Naftali Katz, Divrei Siyum to *Kedusba Uveracha* on Brachos, (p. 588 in Ahavat Shalom ed.) where he speaks about this. The Chida in *Devash Lifi*, (Maareches Vav, 13) also cites this from the Arizal and adds that the sofei teivos add up to 424 which is the gematria of *Moshiach Ben David*. See also *Avodas Yisrael* of Kozhnitz who discusses this to Avos 1:16, s.v. *vihistalek min hasafek* - regarding the connection to this Mishna and much more as well on Amalek and doubt, see R. Dovid Cohen's *Esther Hamalka*, p. 116-119.

Also, see the explanation of R. Yitzchak Dovber of Liadi, grandson of the *Tzemach Tzedek* in *Seder Tefilla al pi Nusach Hakadosh Harizal* p. 141, Berditchev 5673. See also *Ben Yehoyada* to Chagiga 13a where he points out the the Roshei Teivos of the names of the Avos add up to vadai, and elaborates. See *Zohar*, vol. 2, 65a, "Hashem said, 'You said, "Is Hashem among us, or not?" I will put you into the hands of the dog'; and right then, 'And Amalek arrived.'" and Rashi to Shemos 17:8.

“And they stood at the bottom of the mountain.”¹⁵ The Sages teach: “Hashem held the mountain over them like a barrel.¹⁶ When the Jews stood at Sinai, Hashem said to them, ‘If you accept the Torah, all is well. If not, your graves will be here.’ Since then, there was a great¹⁷ weakness in the [relationship the Jewish people had with] Torah. However, they accepted it once again in the time of Achashveirosh, as the verse says, ‘The Jews fulfilled and accepted upon themselves and their children’¹⁸ – [meaning that] they fulfilled what they had already accepted long ago.”¹⁹

How are we to understand this bizarre history? How can the Torah be given by force? Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk²⁰ explains that the Jewish people were forced into a relationship with Torah by the clarity they experienced. At Sinai, there was no doubt about what was true and what was not. The Jewish people saw the reality of God and Torah clearly, and this clarity of vision compelled them to accept the truth. It was obvious to them were they not to accept the Torah, they would be no better than empty bodies and the world could not continue to exist. The facts were clear.

However, there is a weakness in making an important decision based purely on a rational analysis of the facts. The mind, while reasonably strong, lacks the power of the passionate heart. A man who chooses a wife according to a well-thought-out plan has a different relationship from the person who makes his choice out of love, even though the emotions of love have a distressing habit of muddying the facts. The Jewish people, understanding so clearly the truth and necessity of Torah, missed the opportunity to really get their emotions wrapped up in Hashem and His Torah.

Until Purim.

The Purim story was the chance for the Jews to take the relationship that was based upon rational facts and inject some passion into it.

The Purim story occurred in a time of darkness, in an exile where the Jewish people could not clearly see the hand of God. His name is not even mentioned in the Megillah! While the Purim experience was a time when, intellectually, things were not as clear as they had been in the

15 Shemos 19:17

16 Regarding the significance of the barrel, see R. Yosef Yoizel, the *Alter* of Novhardok’s *Madregas Haadam*, “Tikkun Hamidos,” p 27. See also *Daas Zekenim* and Rosh to Dvarim 32:10, who understand that the concept of the mountain being like a barrel was described in the Torah (Dvarim 32:10) as “You surrounded them.”

17 The word “great” here is, in fact, understood by Chida in his *Dvash Lifi* (*mem*, 29) to mean “insignificant.” For, we find, regarding the Kiddush of Shabbos day, which is less important than the one at night, and is called *Kiddusha rabbah*, “the great *Kiddush*,” for in Rabbinic Aramaic, often something is called by its extreme opposite, a blind person is called *sagi nabor*, “one with much light,” and so on. (See *Maggid Mishnah* to Rambam’s *Hilchos Shabbos*, ch. 29.)

18 Esther 9:27

19 Shabbos 88a

20 *Meshech Chochmah*, Shemos 19:17

past, this created an emotional opportunity to connect using the heart.

Thus, it was Amalek, represented by their descendant Haman, who came to attack us. Armed with knowledge of right and wrong, he ignored it. The Jewish reaction, however, was exactly the opposite: even when there could be doubts cast upon right and wrong in the darkness of exile, we allowed our minds to guide our hearts. We internalized, we really felt, what was right – “The Jews fulfilled and accepted upon themselves and their children’²¹ – [meaning that] they fulfilled what they had already accepted long ago.”²²

When all is sunny and one makes a commitment, he may need to wait for the cloudy times until he discovers the depth of his commitment. That is the connection that solidifies a relationship. It is the commitment that lasts, the one that gives depth. It is a commitment based upon the heart having internalized the intellect. When a person remains committed even in times of darkness – in sickness and in health – that is a triumph of intellect working with passion.

“One is obligated to inebriate himself on Purim until he can no longer distinguish between how cursed Haman is, and how blessed Mordechai is.”²³ When we get that drunk, we are dismissing our minds. Purim is a time to let the heart show how well it has internalized the lessons of the mind. Only when we have a little less clarity of mind can we demonstrate how deep our commitment really runs.

When we do that right, Haman is hung.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once said, “The greatest distance between any two points is the distance that separates our minds from our hearts.”

When you bring a sin offering, make sure that the head of that bird is still connected to the body. In order to avoiding sinning again next time, you need to keep your head connected. Still, there is an important lesson in severing the head, as well. All of that knowledge isn’t worth much unless it enters our hearts. After all, our hearts are what Hashem really wants from us.²⁴

21 Esther 9:27

22 Shabbos 88a

23 Megillah 7b

24 Sanhedrin 106b